James Steven Zucarelli
Veteran

Michael Russert
Wayne Clark
Interviewers

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Cambridge, New York

MR: This is an interview at Lyons Hall, Canisius College, Buffalo, New York. It is the 7th of May, 2008, approximately 1PM. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clark. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth, please?
JSZ: Full name is James Steven Zucarelli. Steven without the "ph", "ev". Date of birth is December 6, 1946, which happens to be the Feast of St. Nicholas. Place of birth is Buffalo, New York.

MR: What was your educational background prior to entering service?
JSZ: Well, I have always been educated in the religious world. I went nine years with the Franciscan nuns in grammar school, including kindergarten, and then I went four years with the Christian Brothers at St Joseph's Collegiate Institute, and then I finished it off at Canisius College with the Jesuits. And after I got my diploma on one end of the stage at Kleinhans, I got my gold bars at the other end of the stage as an officer of the Marines.

MR: Did you go into the ROTC program here?
JSZ: No, the ROTC program is Army. The Marine Corps then, as they do now, has PLC, and that stands for Platoon Leaders Class. It's the equivalent of the Army ROTC or the Air Force ROTC. Kind of a unique program. I discovered it by error, but it has the exact same intent as the Army ROTC. That is, once you get your baccalaureate degree, you also get commissioned.

MR: And when did you receive that commission?
JSZ: On the 8th of June 1968.

MR: After you received that, what was your assignment? Why don't we go back to−could you explain a little bit more about the program and how it worked?
JSZ: Sure. When I say I discovered it by error, it was−certain things in my life and I say this with all humility… One of my favorite movies is Forrest Gump because of so many things that happened to him without him engineering it, and so many things have happened to me in my life without me choreographing it, that I find it to be quite interesting. As a matter of fact, one of my philosophies is, life is full of ironies. When I was at St. Joe's and into my Canisius College years, I was dating a girl, and I was

infatuated, and I figured this was the love of my life. One day she said to me−I was a sophomore, about this time, this month, of 1966−she said, "I want to date someone else." We had been going together for four years and I said, "I can't lose you," and she insisted on, "Let's date somebody else," and I said to her−I still can remember where we were parked, as a matter of fact−I said, "If you don't date me anymore and if we break up, "I'm going to, I'm going to," and I started stumbling and I said, "I'm going to quit college, join the Marine Corps, go to Vietnam and get killed." It just came out of my mouth rapid-fire like. And, well, she broke up with me, and I'm a man of my word. At the end of my sophomore year at Canisius−'66−I drove down to the Armed Forces Recruiter which is now the City Campus of Erie Community College; it was the old Post Office. I walked into the Marine Corps Office, Recruiter's Office and I said, "I'm going to join the Marine Corps." Now this was '66, the war was going on, it was escalating, they probably needed bodies. This is one of things where I am a firm believer that there is a good Lord; that someone is up there looking after me and everybody else on this planet. Whereas the recruiter−I must have said I had two years at Canisius College, that must have rung a bell, because he walked me into the officer candidate room, where there was a Marine Captain, a young guy, I'll never forget it. I can still see him; I can still see his face in my mind. This is, what, forty-two years ago, and I said to him, "I want to join the Marine Corps." "Yes, good, really good. You want to be a Marine?" I said, "Yes Sir, I want to be a Marine." Who in your family was a Marine? I said, "Never. I will be the first one." "Do you think you'll make it?" "Yes, Sir." "Why are you joining the Marine Corps−patriotism, love of country, you want to be the best?" I said, "No, Sir, I broke up with a girl." And I'll never forget what he did. We were about this far apart. [Motions short distance with hands] He left his desk, came across to me, grabbed me by the shirt, lifted me out of the chair, threw me against the wall and, I can't use the words he used because we're on tape, but said, "I will not allow you to throw away your education over some girl." He said, "You will not do that. The most important thing, the most precious thing in your life is getting your education, getting your degree. Screw the girl." He didn't say screw. And I was sitting there absolutely petrified. He literally lifted me up. I felt like he was lifting me up. But he had me pinned against the wall. Then he threw me back in the chair. He said, "You listen to me?" I said, "Yes, Sir." "Now I'm going to sign you up for the PLC program, and we're going to get you as a Second Lieutenant once you get that degree from Canisius." And I signed; that was June 6, 1966, D-Day. 1966, I signed on the dotted line. He said, "Now you're in a Platoon Leaders Class; go get your junior year and your senior year at Canisius and I'll see you in two years." Unbelievable. And I was ready to give everything up. He literally saved my career, my life, where I was going. But it was one of those little things where God intervenes. We have a lot of free will in our life−he intervened at that moment and had that man there; as opposed to that man getting me as a quota for the day, he got me as a quota for two years from now. Came back to Canisius, did my junior year, did my senior year.

MR: Now you didn't have to take any…?

JSZ: No, as opposed to ROTC, what I had to do was I had to go−in between my junior and senior year−I had to go to Quantico, Virginia for ten weeks.

WC: Was that a basic training?
JSZ: Officer candidate basic training. I'll never forget−there are certain things I'll never forget. Sixty-seven men went into my company; ten weeks later twenty-eight graduated, and I'll never forget one of the guys that went through it was a Canisius College classmate of mine. He was one of those that didn't make it, and I felt very bad. But it was ten weeks of−it was boot camp, it's like what you go through on Parris Island.

WC: Did they not make it because of academics, or did they quit or what happened?
JSZ: It was a combination of that. A−You had to be physically fit; B−you had to pass the academics. It was the exact same thing as Marine Corps boot camp, but an elevated level. I always have this little discussion with my friends that were enlisted Marines. "You went through Quantico, you didn't go through Parris Island or San Diego." I said, "Quantico is as rough physically as it is in Parris Island; the only difference is that they inject a lot of the elevated demands on you as a candidate, as a recruit, because you're eventually going to be an officer. So, you have to know tactics, you have to know leadership, you have to have command presence and all that, which they expect from you from day one." So, sixty-seven went in; twenty-eight graduated ten weeks later. The other ones, they couldn't make it physically, they couldn't make it academically within the program, or they just said, "This is not what I want to do." So, I completed my college education here at Canisius, and like I said, on June 8, 1968, the graduation ceremony was held at Kleinhans because things were smaller than they are now. I remember I was in my dress whites. The Marine Corps doesn't have dress whites any more. But white everything, from white socks to white buck shoes. It was a dress white uniform; everybody is familiar with the dress blues. Back then the Marines Corps had dress whites because we were under the naval service. We did away with those probably in the '70s. I walked on stage and I got my diploma−Bachelor of Science, political science as a major, and at the end of the stage was the officer. There were four of us that graduated to the Marines. There was an Army officer who gave the gold bars to the ROTC graduates, and there was a Marine officer who gave the gold bars to four of us Marines. I went out and afterwards went into the parking lot, and my grandmother and mother pinned my bars on me. My grandmother pinned my bars on my left and my mother pinned my gold bar on my right. That was June 8th and the ironic part−I don't know how familiar you are with Title 32, Title 10. Title 32 is when you're in the Reserve program, the National Guard program. Title 10 is when you're active duty. When you're Title 10, you are on active duty, part of the military, directly under the Department of Defense. Well, I graduated from college on June 8th. I was to report into Quantico on June 14, 1968. Title 10, which means I belonged to the United States Marine Corps. I'm part of them. June 14, 1968. I'm going to fast forward. When I was in the Army National Guard called up for the war in Iraq, I reported into Camp Drum as an Army National Guardsman. On June 14, 2004, I'm on Title 10. So, on June 14, 1968 I went active duty in the Marine Corps as a Second Lieutenant, and on June 14, 2004, I went

active duty United States Army as a Lieutenant Colonel. So, what is the math, '68 to '04 −38 years later. The Forrest Gump thing, who could have made those arrangements, kind of like directed that? And then after I graduated from Canisius and went into the Marine Corps, I was gone for three years, June 14th, and I came back June 1, 1971.

WC: Where did you begin your career?
JSZ: I went down to Quantico, Virginia, and Quantico, Virginia, which is the only officer candidate school in the officer developmental school in the Marine Corps, as opposed to the other four armed services. The Marines only train their officers at Quantico. And from June 14th until approximately November 14th, it was officer training, development. I was a Second Lieutenant then, with all Second Lieutenants, and we were trained in everything from amphibious warfare to leadership techniques, survival techniques, anything having to do with the military. Your standard, run-of-the-mill training that every officer gets. How to lead, how to use a radio, how to read a map, decision making, how to fire weapons and all that, and then in November of '68 I graduated from Quantico and my orders for Vietnam was December '68.

MR: In retrospect when you got into Vietnam, did you think you were adequately trained?
JSZ: Absolutely, uncategorically, no. I was not. What do they say about the greatest war plan? Goes out the window when the first shot is fired. No. In fact, when I was in Vietnam, when I was in combat, I used to say to myself, "The Christian Brothers and the Jesuits did not train me for this." I was in a constant state of fear, and horrific fear, which is, I think, is one of the reasons I survived, because I did not become complacent. The people, a lot of the men in this current war, a lot of the women that get hurt is because complacency sets in. That's one of the things that an officer is never supposed to allow. An officer is supposed to always−and an NCO, a good non-commissioned officer−is always supposed to insure you're at the cutting edge, tip-of-the-arrow of awareness of where you are. You can come down when you are out of the war zone, but while you are in the war zone, you should always be alert to the point where it's almost not a typical human response. Which to me is one of the reasons why we have a lot of men and women with post-traumatic stress disorders, suffering from PTSD, because you can't inject yourself, you can't take a person in typical Americana suburbia, inject them into a high intensity war zone, keep them there for a year, and then bring them back without some sort of withdrawal techniques or allowing the people to immerse themselves back in the society. That's one of the problems with the military, is that−you're home, boom, you're home now, what do you do? You're mind, you're not trained for that. I was not trained… I suffered terribly from post-traumatic stress disorder. No one… That acronym did not exist back in '71. We were dealing with−we were the first veterans since the successful… This is Jim Zucarelli's philosophy, in my opinion. This country and I'm going to hold off on the Iraq war−history still has to be written on that. But if I can simply put it, in a very simplistic way where anybody can understand it, in every single war this country has been involved in since the Revolutionary War, up until the war in Southeast Asia−Vietnam−we have never lost a major conflict. We were always

the victors. And I'm speaking generally here. Korea is a blip to that opinion. Korea−we didn't lose it, but we surely didn't win it because the Communist North Korea still exists and look what they are doing today. Although we can take a look at where China is today, so the jury it still out on that war. My personal opinion is, in Vietnam, and I get into a lot of disagreement with my fellow Vietnam veteran comrades and brothers, we lost that war. And so, saying that, when I came back from that war, I was a pariah. I don't know how many times I was not asked, but told, or insinuated, how many children did you kill, how many babies did you kill, how many women did you kill? In fact, I even had one person say to me, "Too bad you weren't killed and some of those that you killed were still alive." I went through some really traumatic times. The VA wasn't set up for it. My father, back then, was a sixty-year old World War II vet. They won their war, they made the world safe for democracy, they were keeping the Soviets at bay in the Cold War−everything was happening good. We came back to a very unpopular population, for an unpopular war, but the thing that amazes me, and I'll never forget the person that told me this, and today I inject that into any conversation I have when it comes to a war, a conflict. I say, "In Vietnam, the United States of America equated the war with the warrior." And I said, "Let that never happen again." No matter what you think of conflicts, and that goes from the incursion into Noriega's Panama, to the Persian Gulf in the1990's, right up until Iraq and Afghanistan−however you feel about that, you have a right to feel negative, positive, or indifferent−but don't ever equate the negativeness of war with those kids going over there, the warriors, because they're doing their duty, like I did my duty. When I came back home, I was in a closet until 1979. I didn't talk about it; I avoided conflicts. I didn't join any veteran's organizations, never did anything because of what it was doing. I was twenty-four years old. What experience−you know they talk about life, to get wisdom of life, you need two things− you need intelligence and experience. You might get the intelligence because of that college across the street there, "Okay, I got a baccalaureate degree in political science−I'm intelligent." Where do you get the experience? You get the experience by stumbling in life, making decisions, scuffing up your knee, going through becoming an employee for an employer, raising a family, getting married and all that. Once you get that experience behind you, as well as the intelligence level behind you, you've achieved wisdom. Well, what does a twenty-four-year-old know about wisdom? And that was part of my experience base, going through what I went through. When I got home on June 1, 1971−my father was a wonderful man, he passed away this past summer. World War II vet, U.S. Navy, aviator, very proud of his military service during the war. From June 1st of 1971 until Labor Day, I never left my parents' house, never walked out the door. To the point where my parents were scared stiff, "What has happened to my son?" Then my father, he literally threw me out of the house. He said, "Get out of the house, you're scaring your mother and me." I said, "Dad, I don't know what's… I don't want to go out there." "Go out there." "I don't want to go out there−it's an unfriendly world," and he had no idea what I was talking about. I didn't know what I was talking about. So, what I did, is the day my father threw me out of the house, I walked to the local bus stop−I didn't have a car−and took a bus to downtown Buffalo. I got off at St Louis' Church, which was across the street from the Courier Express, and I walked down Main

Street. When I walked down Main Street, I got to Main and the street right across from City Hall, Main and Court, made a right−Woolworth's was, I think, on the corner there, no not Woolworth's, it was a bank…

MR: Liberty Bank.
JSZ: Bank of Buffalo and Liberty Bank, and there was a [unclear]travel agent and I walked in, and I said, "How much for a ticket to Europe?" and I'll never forget what the person said, "Hey, we've got a deal. Islandic Airlines round trip ticket−$168 round trip ticket is good for a year." I said, "Give me one." So, I paid $168 and got a round trip ticket and I went home and said to my parents, "I'm going to Europe." I put a backpack on my back, and I came back a year later to the day. 366 days because '72 was leap year. I put a backpack on my back, flew to Europe and I walked across the entire continent for a year. There wasn't a park bench in Europe I didn't sleep on. I made it as far east as Moscow−Leningrad, back then it was Leningrad−up to the Arctic Circle, down to Madrid, down to as far south as Rome. I was in East Berlin, East Germany. Every country except Portugal. I just walked. And then when I stopped walking, I jumped on a train. The conductor would come up, "Where's your ticket?" "I don't have one." They'd throw me off at the next city. I'd just get on another train. That's what I did for a year. Why? I didn't have a VA to go to. I didn't have a Veterans Assistance Center to go to because my time in Vietnam−I was only in Vietnam two months, of the two months, seven weeks was leading a combat platoon.

MR: Can we go back to that? When did you arrive in Vietnam?
JSZ: December 22nd. December 22, 1968. And I was wounded seven times on Feb 22, 1969. Landed in Vietnam. Here's another story, unbelievable story−you're from Buffalo, this should ring a bell. I landed in Vietnam on December 22, 1968, and they get off the plane, they go, "Okay, Lieutenant, where are you going to?" I said, "I'm 26th Marine Regiment." They said, "Okay, jump in the back of this three-quarter ton." So, I jumped in the back of this three-quarter ton and we were just driving through the city of Da Nang out to the regimental headquarters, and no weapon because I hadn't checked into the unit yet. I'd just left Buffalo, NY; I'd just left Canisius College−six months ago, seven months ago I was in college, now I'm in Vietnam. So, I walked through the wire−where do you always report in? You always report into the S1 adjutant's office, so I asked the guard where the adjutant's office was. "Lieutenant, it's right over there." So, I walked into the adjutant's office and sat down. There was a First Lieutenant there. I said, "Lieutenant Zucarelli reported as ordered, Sir." The Lieutenant said, "You don't have to sir me; I'm a First Lieutenant, you're a Second, we're Lieutenants". So, he starts checking me in. He says, "Where you from?" I said, "East Coast." He said, "I'm from the East Coast too. Where on the East Coast?" I said, "New York." He said, "I'm from New York State, too." He said "Where in New York?" I said, "Buffalo." He said, "You've got to be kidding me. I'm from Buffalo, too." I said, "What part of Buffalo?" He said, "I grew up in Amherst." I said, "I grew up in Amherst." He said, "Where in Amherst?" I said, "Snyder." He said, "I grew up in Snyder. What parish do you go to?" I said, "Christ the King." He said, "That's my parish." I said, "What's your name?"

"Frank J. Clark". I said. "I'm Jim Zucarelli." I didn't know him, but Frank Clark is our District Attorney. Frank J. Clark is our DA. In fact, I've still got the paper that he signed on December 22nd—Frank J. Clark who is now the District Attorney for Erie County. First time I met him—I probably lived a couple of blocks from him—was in Da Nang, South Vietnam. So, he said to me, "I'm going to do you a favor." This was December 22nd. "We won't send you out into the field until after New Year's. I said, "Thanks, I appreciate that." So, he sent me to an LPOP— a listening post observation post. So, I climbed up this mountain on December 24th, Christmas Eve, and there was one thing I did learn, even though I was a Second Lieutenant, I didn't know crap. There was this Marine Gunnery Sergeant who probably had a thousand years of service, so I said, "Gunny, you're in charge." He said, "Okay, Lieutenant, just follow me." That night we got hit by an ambush team that attacked the listening post observation post, and I can still remember the Viet Cong were running down the top of this path, this ridge line towards us, and I pulled out my forty-five caliber weapon and I got into position and I squeezed the trigger and went… [motions with hands as though holding a gun and squeezing the trigger with no result] I banged it on the ground, and it was jammed, and I jumped into a bush and I got into a fetal position. I'll never forget that—my knees were under my chin. There was a big firefight going on and I had no weapon, two days in country and I'm scared stiff. After the firefight it was all over, nobody got killed. I don't know about them, but nobody got killed with us. I walked down the next day, Christmas Day, and I said to Frank, "Don't do me any favors." So, on January 3, 1969, I got sent out to the field, and I took over the second platoon of Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, and I led that platoon from the 3rd January of 1969 and, by the way, the 3rd of January 1987, my son was born—so 18 years later, I think my math is right—and I led that platoon until the 22nd of February 1969, and every day it was either combat patrol, or nighttime combat ambush—ambush at night, patrol at day. Sometimes the patrols would last three or four days out in the jungle. Some days it was a one-day patrol. Firefights just about every day.

MR: What kind of weapon did you carry this time?
JSZ: I carried a 45, but, I also carried an M16 or a shotgun. I also did things like the traditional military—whenever you see the military, the lieutenant is always in the middle of the column with the radio man behind him, with the whip antenna and all that type of stuff because in that war, the Viet Cong really sought out four people. They sought out the officer, they sought out the radio man, they sought out the Marine carrying the M16 machine gun because that gave the highest rate of power, and they usually sought out the platoon sergeant. If they could kill or wound the officer and the platoon sergeant, if they could disable the high-grade weapon, the machine gun, if they could kill the communication, you could have a whole platoon of forty men that, for that moment in time—which all you need is a split second for people to be uncoordinated, militarily speaking—you gave the enemy the advantage. A lot of times I walked in the back, a lot of times I walked in the front, sometimes I carried the radio, a lot of times I helped carry the ammunition belt for the machine guns, just to throw people off. But it's funny, I look at pictures of that war. My God, compared to what it is now in Iraq. When I was in Iraq I

felt like Iron Man, walking along with all that armor and protective gear. In Vietnam, ninety percent of the time, I wore two things, boots−socks rotted off you, so boots−and your utility trousers; that was it. You wore your body armor, which wouldn't even be considered today as body armor, but during the heat you'd take it off. A lot of times I'd be in a firefight, just bare-chested in utility trousers and boots.

MR: Did you wear a helmet at all?
JSZ: Wore a helmet, a lot of times I took the helmet off−that's one of the reasons for my many wounds and I'll admit it to this day. I wasn't wearing a helmet and I wasn't wearing body armor−that's why I got hit so many times. I got hit by seven grenades. I got shrapnel from my head all the way down to my ass. You know, in my chest and my arms. But I was scared stiff every moment I was there. Petrified. It was a controlled fear, very alert, always looking at the ground, always aware of what was going on. I was very successful after I did get out of the Marine Corps and came back home and went through that trauma of sequestering myself in my parents' house for three months, and then walking across Europe for a year by myself trying to find who I was. I came back home. I went into the closet, and was very successful at that until '79−I didn't tell anybody I was in the Marines; didn't tell anybody I was a Vietnam veteran. If anybody asked, I'd say, "No." You know, nobody really asked back then because the war ended for the U.S. in '73. It ended for the South Vietnamese in '75 on April 30th when Saigon was overrun. I figured that it was just like anything else in life, the best way to control pain is just don't even realize it's there. I must have taken a lot of mental placebos every day to get through this. And after a while it worked so good, that in the mid-80's, I even doubted in my own mind that I went to Vietnam. I even said, "Did I really do this?" and that's how I got involved in the Vietnam community.

MR: I'm going to go back again. How were you wounded? Were you in a firefight or an ambush?
JSZ: Yes, it was February 22nd, it was a Saturday, we can do this whole interview on that one day. I can remember that day, every minute of every hour of that day, but one of the Marines in my platoon−his name was Corporal Schneibel, survived Khe Sanh−and it was his last day in Vietnam. It was the thirtieth day of the thirteenth month. He was going back home. He was one of the guys, "Lieutenant, I want to go on a patrol with you." "No, you're not going out, damn it." "Lieutenant, I want to go on an ambush." "No, you're not going out, you're staying back doing hill security." He said, "I'm a Marine." I said, "You survived Khe Sanh, you survived twelve months in country, and if I'm making the decision you are going to do hill security for the last month you're here. You're just going to be on the wire." So, it was his last day. I said, "Corporal Schneibel, we're going to make sure you get back safely to Da Nang," which was about twenty kilometers from where we were, about thirteen miles, twelve miles. So, I ran up to my Company Commander, my Skipper−Captain Moorehead was his name. I wanted to tell him, "The Lieutenant's going to be off the field to take one of my Marines back to Da Nang to see him off safely." He wasn't there. I told his radio man, "Tell the Skipper I'm off". So, we walked outside the wire, and just like the way you got around in those days,

you saw a passing vehicle, you jumped on board. Get into Da Nang, I'm going to fast forward. He got on the aircraft and we're right at the tarmac and he's about ready to get into the freedom bird and fly home, and I gave him a big bear hug, and I said, "Corporal Schneibel, God bless you. You made it. Today is my second month in country−22 December to 22 February. I've got eleven months to go. Eleven months from today I'm leaving." Gave him a bear hug, gave him a Semper Fidelis, he got on the aircraft and I started hitchhiking back to hit 190. That was my real true moment of being depressed.

If I was depressed it happened that one day, because I got to what was called Freedom Hill, which was the USO Center in Da Nang, and I was supposed to jump on another vehicle to get out into the bush, but I went into the USO. Everybody knows what the American Red Cross girls−they were called Doughnut Dollies−and I walked in and I saw these American girls, and they looked like beauty queens. They were probably eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year old American Red Cross girls, and I got a cup of coffee and a doughnut, and I was sitting at this table and I got this wave−a tsunami of depression. "Oh, my God, am I going to make it for eleven months?" because I had just been in combat for seven weeks out of eight. I said, "I'm not going to survive." I just got this wave−this overwhelming feeling of depression, and I hate that word depression. I'd rather use melancholy and sadness, but that day I was depressed. I had the cup of coffee, saw those [unclear]girls for the last time, got on down, not knowing that I'd see them again that night. Finally hitchhiked back out to [unclear] 190, went through the wire and I saw this commotion all over the hill. And I walked up into the platoon. My platoon dugout−we lived in bunkers−was empty. Someone said, "Hey, Lieutenant, Skipper's looking for you." So, I walked up there, and he was standing on an ammo box with field glasses on, looking across the Son River into the area where the Viet Cong operated freely. He looked at me and said, "Lieutenant, where were you?" I said, "Sir, didn't you get the message? I took Corporal Schneibel back to Da Nang." He said, "No, I didn't get it, and as far as I'm concerned you were UA−unauthorized absence. You abandoned your post. The hill got hit. Four Marines were killed." If you go to the Wall in Washington, DC, their four names are all together. "Four Marines were killed and I sent your platoon out as a reaction for it to chase down the Viet Cong. And your platoon sergeant was leading them where you should have been leading. Get your ass into my hooch, because I'm going to take those bars away from you." I said, 'Captain I can't, I've got to go on an ambush tonight." He said, "I'll see you in the morning". And I wasn't supposed to go out on an ambush that night. It was my 'night off' so to speak. You'd go on three nights of ambush, you'd take one night sleeping on your cot, so I went down and I got my right [unclear] and I said, "My ass is grass. I'm dead." I said, "We've got to take an ambush." He said, "Lieutenant, everybody's been on ambushes every night. It was no ambushes tonight. They're dead," I said, "Put together an ambush team." So, I put together eleven guys, I was the twelfth guy.

We left the wire and we walked down this road until it started getting dark, and then I cut off into the rice paddies, and I said, "We're going to set the ambush up right here." Then I got this overwhelming feeling that we were being watched. Someone was watching us.

And it wasn't dark enough. And I said, "The VC is watching us and if they know where we are, we're going to be surprised," so I told the Marines to get up and walk down this path. I said, "We're going to set the ambush up right here." And all I remember is this dark silhouette in front of me. Dark silhouette. Sergeant said, "Lieutenant, this is…" I said, "Shut up. Keep quiet. This is where we're setting the ambush up. Put a four-man team over there, a four-man team here−which would be me and three other Marines−and a four-man team behind us for our rear security." And the guy that told me that−I only found out back in 2002−was Corporal Allen Knight. I'm going to see him in a couple of weeks for a reunion. He was the one that came up to me, and was trying to tell me, "This isn't a path, this is a fork, and there's two roads that are going to come right to where we are. So, if they come down the wrong road, they are going to walk all over us". So, it was super-hot that night, it would be like 105 degrees with 100 percent humidity. And I took my flak jacket off, and I took my twelve grenades and put them in my helmet, took my helmet off, got on the radio and I asked for a radio check with the hill. I said, "[unclear] Charlie, loud and clear." I asked for a time check. They said, "20:15," which was 8:15. I put the 25-radio down, and I told two guys in the hole, "You two guys sleep for the first couple of hours, and I'll stay up," and all of a sudden looked up there, and right about where those cameras are [points to cameras in back of room], was a path. I saw all these black silhouettes with the typical Vietnamese combed hat, walking right there. I had all the Claymore mines−we called them hellboxes, the things that initiated them. I had them all brought to me. I was the Lieutenant; if anything was going to be initiated, it would be initiated by me. I had four Claymore mines out there; I grabbed all four of them, and I waited until that first one was right at the first Claymore, and I pressed them simultaneously. All I saw was all this orange; and about four or five human beings just completely evaporated for the lack of a better term. You know what a Claymore mine is? They were just consumed by flashes, whiteness and the explosion of the Claymore. Every ambush that I ever went on−it was a classic ambush−once you set off the Claymore you all stand up. Every weapon gets on automatic; you just spray the entire area in front of you. Within 8-10 seconds it's over. Then you go tag the bodies and you usually drag them to a place, the next morning the helicopters come and pick up the dead bodies, and they turn it over to G2, and the intelligence guys that figure out what's going on. We stood up. We started spraying the area. All of a sudden, the weapons fire from out there to us was ten times the rate of fire that we were giving, and I go, "Holy shit, I thought I ambushed a sapper team coming into Da Nang," which would have been maybe 12 men at the most, but it was a point element of a higher unit−company or battalion−so it was either the point of 200 or 300 men that were maybe 100 meters away, the length of a football field. So, I turned around to… I gave an order, I turned around for the guys in that hole to move back to where the other four were, so that the power of 12, and a grenade landed, and it went off and it hit me in the head and I went onto the ground. Shrapnel went into my skull. It's still there as a matter of fact; it never came out. When I started to get up again, and I found out I was all by myself now, because the last order I gave was to go back, another grenade went off and that one went into my back and took out my left lung. I didn't know it then, but it went into my back. See no helmet, no body armor, and it took my left lung out, and I went down on the

ground again. The next thing I know I'm being dragged back and the pain of one of my Marines dragging me back to where we were, was just phenomenally painful. They threw me down and there were four of us that were really gravely wounded. The other eight got into a wagon wheel, the old classical wagon wheel, so it was eight defending against what was out there. They kept throwing grenades and I remember they would land, and these were Chinese grenades, Chicoms, they weren't our grenades which, I would have been killed. These were probably hand-made on the Ho Chi Minh trail or something. A grenade would land where she is [points across the room] and blow up and I'd feel the shrapnel going in, and it got to the point where it became comical. The seventh guy said, "Stop this, this is crazy." I was on the radio once when a grenade went off and I was lifted into the air and the cord on the radio extended. I'd be calling for air support and artillery, and I remember my Company Commander said, "We can't give it to you." I said, "Well give me−I need illumination; I need to see what's out there." And I remember I used the term−I don't know where I got it from−I said, "Skipper, it's darker than the inside of a cow's ass out here, we need light." He said, "I can't; there's friendly aircraft in the area." I said, "What friendly aircraft? I don't see anything." Every other word of my mouth was "F". And he kept saying, "Lieutenant, watch your language." It was comical. I was in a firefight asking for help to save us, and he's trying to keep me calm−don't use foul language−and then what we saw was Puff the Magic Dragon, the old DC-3, and it just orbited around us and was just laying down fire. It started at 8:20 at night and at 10:05 the reaction team came out, so it was for an hour and forty-five minutes. My life was saved, and this was another part of Forrest Gump's irony. My life was saved. Certain things in life happen in a split second; other things in life that happen in an actual split section is like an eon goes by, a whole lifetime. Well, I remember I was sitting there; all I had left was one grenade. One grenade−my weapon was smashed, I had thrown the other eleven, and I had my father's World War II knife with me, his KA-BAR, he got one as a naval aviator because he used to fly PBY's. I had the knife in the ground and the last grenade. I remember I looked up and, right about again where she is, out of this bush jumps a Viet Cong. Now I am going to tell you what I remember vividly. I remember looking into his eyes, and I remember him looking into my eyes. I remember him lifting his AK-47 right at me laying there, and I remember saying to myself−and this is going to sound like melodrama but I've lived this−I remember saying, "If I pull the pin and throw the grenade, I'm going to kill myself. If I throw the knife−I don't know how to throw knives−I'm going to miss him." This is all going through my head. Next thing I know, have you ever seen a man die? He just fell like a pile of protoplasm, just fell into nothingness, and I looked over and there's Corporal Edwin J. Smolarek, Jr., one of my Marines. He said, "Lieutenant, I got me a gook; I got me a gook." Just like that−he saw the Viet Cong, shot him like that, he went down, and in my mind, this is all going through in slow motion. Smoky saved my life. He survived that night, he was wounded, he survived that night. On August 18th, he was killed in Vietnam. Okay. He is buried probably 150 feet from where you're sitting. He's buried right there in Forest Lawn under an oak tree overlooking Canisius College. He's Class of '66 at Bishop Doherty. So, a Buffalo boy saved my life. When my daughter went to Canisius College, for four years she used to walk across the street and sit up against a tree, and study by his grave,

because this is the man that saved my life. And he was killed on August 18th and buried here. So, survived that night. They put me on a helicopter. I went into China Beach which that television program China Beach was based on, the 95th Evac hospital. The testosterone was really flowing that night as well as the beauty of being in shock. I walked off the helicopter into the 95th Evac and they put me on a gurney, and the next thing I looked up and there were two Army nurses looking at me, the most beautiful females I ever saw in my life. And they cut all my clothes off me, and next thing I know the doc is cutting my chest open−I'm sure they gave me something−but he cut my chest open, right to my lung and stuck a tube in there. Put me into an air-conditioned unit. I remember the Catholic priest coming, and giving me last rites, and I said, "Hey Padre, I'm not going to die." And he gave me last rites. Well, up until about three years ago, I've always attributed this to the marvels of morphine, because after the priest was gone, and I was wrapped up in this white sheet in this air-conditioned building−Quonset Hut−I had this feeling of total and complete beautiful euphoria. I never had felt that way ever in my life or since in my life, and I remember watching me lay there from about this position [puts arm up in air to indicate position up above]. I was looking down at myself and I remember being in so much euphoria that I said, "If this is what dying is, great, I'm ready," because it was just marvelous. I remember coming back down into me. I said, "My God, the morphine. Is that why addicts that become drug addicts stay on that stuff?" It was just unbelievable. That was February 22, 1969. I went to a Marine Corps reunion−this was two years ago, so that was 2006−Marine Corps reunion, and I met my Corpsman, Doc Watts, who lives in Illinois. He was the one who came out with the reaction force. I told him the story and I said, "Boy, Doc, you must have really shot me up with morphine." He said, Lieutenant, I never gave you morphine−you had a sucking chest wound. You don't give morphine to people with a sucking chest wound." And another one of the Corpsman said, "LT, you didn't get morphine. You got no morphine at all." I said, "What was that experience I had? Out-of-body?" He said, "I don't know what is was, but you didn't get it from an artificial drug." I don't know if that was an actual out-of-body experience. I have no idea, but I'll never forget it. I was in the 95th Evac for a week and then I spent seven weeks in the U.S. Naval Hospital in Yokosuka, Japan. Then I spent my last eight months on Okinawa. Never went back to the field. I have no idea what the reason was−I was still a functioning officer. I don't know what it was.

I finished off my tour on Okinawa, came back home to Buffalo, and I can tell you some stories about what it was like coming back home, going through Oakland Alameda Airport with my uniform on, because back then, when they sent you home, they sent you home on military stand-by. So, if you wanted to get home, you had your uniform on. If you wanted to pay for the other half of the ticket, you could take your uniform off. I remember walking thorough Alameda Airport in Oakland, California−I think that's what it's called−and the garbage bins were packed full of uniforms. Guys were throwing, taking their uniforms off, throwing them away and buying civilian clothes. When I was a Second Lieutenant and I had my uniform on and we got to Chicago O'Hare Airport, and again I had cocooned myself, sitting there like this [raises shoulders to ears] and

alongside me were two Army enlisted soldiers. We were on stand-by. I remember the plane was filling up to Buffalo, New York and they called these three young kids up−about her age [points to someone in room]. I remember this to this day. The kid says to me, "Lieutenant, does military stand-by take precedence over student stand-by?" I said, "I have no idea, but it sounds good to me." So, I walked up and asked, "Does military stand-by take precedence over student stand-by?" And she said, "Yes." "Well then, get those kids off the plane and put us on, for Christ's sake." So, they took those three college kids off and as we were walking by them−I don't know what type of language I can use on this−but "FU, you baby killers," and I just wanted to be left alone. And us three guys got on that aircraft, and we got on that aircraft and everybody on that plane considered us pariahs. You know, they wouldn't look us in the eye, they wouldn't even… "What, these college kids, you take them off? You guys are a bunch of baby killers". When I came home to Buffalo, all I wanted was to get out of Buffalo and go back to Camp Lejeune, which I did. I finished off my active duty service at Camp Lejeune. That's when I came back on June 1, 1971 and it all began. The nightmares began. The three months, like I said, I sequestered myself at my parents' house, then walked across Europe. When I came back from Europe, I was still stunned and I remember my Father used to say−my father is Canisius College, Class of '39; I was Canisius College, Class of '68. My father was a Naval officer, I was a Marine Corps officer. We'd go out−this was after Europe−we'd go out, and my father would say, "This is my Canisius College Marine Corps educated son." I said, "Dad, shut up. I don't want anybody to know that. I don't want anybody to know that at all." And I stayed in the closet until 1979 when my daughter was born. I remember this epiphany happening to me. On the way from the hospital, after she was born, I said, "One of these days this three-day-old child's going to ask me, "What did you do during the war?"" And I thought, "I've got to start getting ahold of things." So, I came out of the closet. I started admitting to people that I was in the military, in the Marine Corps, and then it just blossomed when they built the Wall in '82. That's when I not only came out of the closet, but I threw the key away. And that's when I became actively involved in the veterans' community. And I would not let anybody even the−what was that little island that was invaded in the Caribbean under the Reagan administration?

MR: Grenada.
JSZ: Grenada. I wouldn't even let a Grenada vet go through what we went through, or a Panama vet. I got involved in the veterans' community here in Western New York. There's an organization called the Vietnam Veterans' Leadership Program. They helped build the Wall, the monument that's on the waterfront, they've given out scholarships. They brought in speakers like John McCain, Admiral Zumwalt, General Westmoreland. We used to run a race, 5K race. I got very involved in the veterans' community.

MR: Why do you decide to go into the Guard and you had what? Quite a few years in between…
JSZ: '71 to '89−eighteen years. I always considered myself a patriot, but more than that I have so much love for this country. When someone would ask the question−you can

ask a Canadian this, or a Britt this, or an Italian or a French or a German, "What is a German?" "What is a Frenchman, what is a Canadian?" If someone said to me, "What is an American?" I've always said, in my mind, this is my take on it. What I am proud about my country is three things. Number one, and first and foremost, is the flag. You know, so many men have died for this flag; so many men and women have died for this flag and protected this flag. Number two is our constitution. I think it one of the most wonderful documents that's ever been drafted. Our founding fathers were geniuses. Yes, it's been re-tweaked in two hundred years, but it's still the basic document. And the third thing is our form of government. Our form of government, and checks and, balances, the judicial, the legislative and the executive. It's a form of government where no one man has the ability to control it ad nauseum. That to me is what this country is, and I always felt I owed something to this country and I had certain talents, and I wanted to give back and I wanted to put the uniform back on. And I couldn't get in the Marine Corps reserve because I failed to tell you when I got out of Vietnam I got out with four disabilities. I couldn't get in the Marine Corps Reserve because of my disabilities. I tried to get into the Army Reserve and I failed the physical because of my disabilities. Now that I'm out of the National Guard, I guess I can speak freely. So, when I went for the National Guard interview, I begged the Doc, "Pass me. Just let me get in. Because if you take a chest x-ray of me or if you check me out, I'm not 100 per cent." So, I got into the National Guard. I just wanted to serve my country again. Army National Guard. What was the Army National Guard like in 1989? The traditional one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer. Well, look what it's become. Now I went up the rank, came in as a Captain, became a Major and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, and then, I'll never forget, we all assembled in Albany for what is called a [unclear]. The Adjutant General calls in all the officers once a year, or biannually, and discusses the state of the state. We were sitting there and he goes−[unclear] was General McGuire−he was the Air Force guy at the time. He goes, "As we sit here, on Department of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, on Rumsfeld's desk right now, as we speak, are eight Army Divisions from the National Guard. He's going to pick one to go relieve some of the stress of the active component that is fighting the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. And, lo and behold, Rumsfeld picked the 42nd Infantry Division of New York State, and none of the other seven infantry divisions across the country– National Guard Divisions. So, here I am, 57-year-old Lieutenant Colonel, preparing for a second war, arrived in country when I was 58-years-old and I left when I was 59-years-old, and I served in Baghdad, with the 42nd Infantry Division. I was even older than the Commanding General. I think one of the cutest, if I can use that word, most humorous−there was a ceremony at Fort Drum called the donning ceremony, when you gave up your forest green uniform for your desert camouflage uniforms. Everybody put them on. Governor Pataki was there, the TAG was there, all these generals were there, and I think Schumer showed up. I'm sitting there, it's all over, I'm sitting on the bench, and now we're scheduled to go to Iraq in a couple of weeks, and this young, 19-year-old PFC female comes up to me. She goes, "Colonel Zucarelli, I am so happy that I'm going to Iraq with you because I feel very safe with you." I said, "PFC, why?" She said, "I just feel very safe that you're going that you'll take care of me

because you're older than my grandfather." I said, "You mean your father?". She said, "No, you are a year older than my grandfather." [Laughs]

TAPE CHANGED.

MR: How did you feel about General Taluto as your commanding officer?
JSZ: Wonderful man. And I'd say this without that tape running. Wonderful man, one of the most respected men. I've known him, he's a soldier's general. The guy is the quintessential leader. He's about as perfect as… I served under some really terrible officers that were supposed to be mentors and groomers and helmsmen. General Taluto was just fantastic. I'd walk on crushed glass for that guy.

MR: How did you feel about the mission of the 42nd over there and how they accomplished their mission being a guard unit?
JSZ: I can't give you particulars because the division was stationed to [unclear] but I might get this wrong because it's been so long. There were seventeen or eighteen provinces in Iraq; I think the 19th province was Kuwait, but we got them out of there in 1990. So, I think there were eighteen provinces in Iraq. The 42nd Infantry Division had responsibility for four: Saladin, Sulaymaniyah, [unclear] and Diyala. Those four provinces, and basically the Division's responsibility was all-encompassing. That was seeking out and removing the enemy threat, as well as rebuilding the country, as well as winning the hearts and the minds of the populace, as well as establishing the seeds of democracy, retraining the police force, the border security, rebuilding the medical infrastructure, rebuilding all the infrastructure within those four provinces. Now, when we were there, again this is subject to change because I'm not the subject matter expert on it. When we were there, there were seven major support commands. You had the British in the south out of Basra, you had the Poles that were in the south-southwest, and under the Poles you had an Italian regiment, you had the Rumanian regiment, and off to the west in the Al-Anbar province−the biggest of the eighteen provinces−you had the Marines, and then in the North you had the South Koreans out of Erbil, and to the northwest you had the 11th ACR, 11th Armored Cavalry unit, out of Mosul. And then the 3rd Infantry Division had the force protection [unclear] for Baghdad itself; the embassy, the Green Zone, that area and then the 42nd. So, that was the Brits, the Poles, the Marines, the South Koreans, the 3rd ID, the 42nd ID and the 11th ACR. And they all sent Liaison Officers, L&O's, to Baghdad because you were dealing with two separate entities−DOS, Department of State, and DOD, Department of Defense. And I was in for the reconstruction effort, for the country, the entire country, so I was the Liaison Officer for the reconstruction effort as well as anything else. As an example, if I was walking to the Embassy and someone saw the rainbow patch− "Hey 42nd, I've got to get up to a senior officer; I've got to get up to [unclear]," −I would help them with the arrangements. So, it was kind of like a jack-of-all-trades and master of none, so to speak. But I worked out of an agency called−the acronym was PCO−Project and Contracting Office, which no longer exists, I think. Less than a year ago, it was ended. Their mission ended. I think it was $18.4 billion that Congress had allocated for the rebuilding of Iraq. We got a slice of

that $18.4, and with General Taluto−one of his many things that he had to do besides winning the hearts and minds, rebuilding the infrastructure, controlling the insurgent threat, was the reconstruction effort, everywhere from the oil wells to the dams along the Tigris to irrigation projects to police stations to health facilities, be it hospitals or even clinics. I was down helping the civilians that were in the construction effort and helping them with these efforts. I wasn't the person that made the decisions by any means−I have to make that perfectly clear−that was done by [unclear]. I was the one that kind of like−if there was a speed bump developed somewhere or if there was a minor dam developing, I was the one who kept things free flowing. What any L&O… I had no idea what my day was going to be like. There were days that I was… I worked alone. I was the only guy down in Baghdad, in the Green Zone. Because I worked alone, I worked from like 6AM to 9PM just about every day. I didn't know what a Sunday was or a Monday was, or whatever. The part that I still am uncomfortable with is I lived−I was billeted inside the embassy compound, but I had to walk through the Green Zone for about the length of a kilometer, six tenths of a mile through the Green Zone. Once you left the security of the Marine Corps cordon of the area around the embassy, for that kilometer I was on the streets of Baghdad−in the Green Zone, not the Red Zone−but on the streets of Baghdad to where I got back into a compound where I worked out of. That was Saddam Hussain's former art museum. And in the beginning, it brought back the fears. As a matter of fact, when I eventually came home, everybody now goes through a debriefing as opposed to what we didn't have in Vietnam. That's one of the things that they noticed in me. A lot of the demons and devilish imps that I suffered through in Vietnam that I very, very successfully packed away so far into my subconscious, as deep into my id as possible, my tour in Iraq brought that back out. Basically, it was from the time in the Green Zone when I was alone. You know a cab would come up to you wanting to give you a ride and I thought it was a suicide bomber. There were times I'd be… And this is probably all based on paranoia, but if it's based on paranoia, it controlled me. The time I'd be walking down the street and I'd see a building, and I saw like a little flash of light. I thought it was the reflection of a sniper scope and I'm in the crosshairs and I'd get behind a tree, and I'd sit there, and my heart would be pounding. And there would be kids that would come up to me and I'd pull out my weapon to the point where after nine months of doing this I was left alone. I never walked with a buddy which I should have done−shame on me−but I was by myself. I never coordinated; everybody kind of like worked different hours, so… Once I got inside the compound again I felt relieved. We were hit by mortars and rockets. My sixth day in Baghdad, the embassy got hit by a rocket and killed three people. Sixth day and I'm going, "Oh, Jesus−am I going to make it again?" So, you can't, unless you have ice water flowing through your veins, or unless you're of Vulcan descent, there's no way you can avoid the fears. Why I allowed the fears to remain there is because I remember the fears kept me alive in Vietnam and so I didn't have to worry about… If I got into complacency, I feared that I would be put in an unsafe position. So, I let my instincts just rule. The guys up into [unclear], when you went out you went out on an armored convoy. You had your team, you had your battle buddy. I was all by myself. But I survived. So, after that I came back home three weeks shy of my 59th birthday. I turned 59. I was one of the oldest guys in the Green Zone. In

fact, I was interviewed by USA Today as being a Vietnam Vet and an Iraqi Vet, still in uniform. Whatever happened with that interview, I have no idea. I just loved serving my country. I'm so proud of serving my country. Baggage, emotional psychological baggage, mental, yes, I guess it goes with anything else. It's like, I don't care what you do with your life, by the time you retire, if you were a garbage man you have aches and pains, if you were a secretary you're going to have carpel tunnel, something's going to happen after thirty years of doing the same thing. So, one of the things that I discovered was when you do service to your country, it isn't anything like famous 1950 movies, where everything is glorious and everything is fine, and everything is a perfect world. No, you're going to carry some things. There are some things that I couldn't talk to you about in Vietnam because I'd end up breaking down, like some of the guys that I lost.

MR: Considering all the things you went through, do you have any regrets about taking the path you took?

JSZ: Absolutely, unequivocally, none. Not one. I thank God, I absolutely thank God. It's like in the mid-80's when I had doubts that I was even in Vietnam, that's how much I had suppressed it. Was I there or did I read too many comic books? Did I dream this? Never taken a drug in my life, but I said to myself, "Is this a drug-induced, with not taking drugs, a fantasy?" I had joined organizations. I'm a life member of AMVETs, a life member of the American Legion, a life member of VFW, DAV, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Vietnam Veterans of America. I joined all these organizations as a life member. Why? Not to go to all their meetings, but so when that national commander gets before a congressional subcommittee, he can say, "I am speaking for 377,000 members." But I wrote, and if you go to the Vietnam Veterans of America newsletters−they didn't have websites back then in the eighties−I wrote a letter to the VVA, and it was called a locator file. It was just a short thing, a post card type thing, and I put down, "Second Lieutenant James Zucarelli, Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 26th Marines, Vietnam, December '68. Does anybody remember me?" That was it−does anybody remember me? And I mailed that in, and the next thing I know, I get a phone call from Doc−Doc being a Navy Corpsman−Whitman from Ames, Iowa. He called me and said, "I remember you." He was a Corpsman from the first platoon. He said, "I remember that firefight. I remember watching it. I remember saying, "No one's going to survive this."" Doc Whitman, Robert Whitman, and I still correspond with him, and we got together, and then he introduced me to Allen Knight, the guy who was the figure saying, "We can't set up the ambush here," and I said, "Just shut up and do it." Worked for the Department of Energy in Washington, D.C. Used to brief the President and the Vice President on issues. He went right up the ladder. The next thing I know, we're corresponding. This is all pre-internet. And then in something like 1991, we all drove to Ames, Iowa for our first reunion. And then I went to Washington, D.C. and then I went to… Now I'm starting to meet all these people. One of the most humorous stories was we met in Dallas, Texas for a reunion in 2002, and the theme of the reunion−it was done by the Khe Sanh vets. The 26th regiment was the regiment that was in Khe Sanh that survived the siege. I was a member of the 26th, but it was post-siege. But what the Khe Sanh vets did−anybody in the 26th regiment could come to our reunion. So, us guys that

served in '69 came, and we kind of like clumped together. There were twelve of us from Delta 126. And, like I said, the theme of the reunion was honoring our Docs, our Corpsmen. So, we all sat a table−I love this, I just love this story. We all sat at a table on July 4, 2002 in Dallas, Texas. It was just us Delta guys, and they said, "Okay guys, it's your turn to go up to get the hot dogs and pork and beans and all that. So, we all lined up, and we all got it, and we came back and there's two guys sitting at the table and we all had little name tags. Mine says, "James Zucarelli, Second Lieutenant, 2nd Platoon," and there were two guys sitting at the table. Well, we're all brothers and the first thing we said was, "You guys can join us," and we pulled two more seats up and there were fourteen of us. Well this guy's name tag was turned over. So, we're all eating and we're saying, they're both Corpsmen, "You guys walk on water. We love you, we love you to pieces. This is Doc Whitman and Doc Cahill," and we're all sitting there, we're all Delta guys. We're all talking, we're showing these guys−I'm opening my shirt, "This is where I got wounded." And a couple of the guys−Wendell Wells is lifting up his trouser leg, "This is where I got shot," and for the next hour these two Corpsmen are like, "God, you guys are war heroes." "Oh yeah, this is where I got nicked," and we're all talking war stories and we're all sitting around going, "God, we're really war heroes, right?" So, one guy walks by, and he said, "Hey Doc, good to see you." And he reached up to shake this guy's hand, and his name tag flips over, and it's got "Donald "Doc" Ballard, Medal of Honor Winner." And I go, "Doc Ballard, you won the Medal of Honor in Vietnam." He said, "Yeah, I did." I said, "You just listened to us for the last hour like we were all Medal of Honor winners." He said, "I love to hear you guys talk. It was wonderful." So, we sat and had lunch with a Medal of Honor winner. A Navy Corpsman who served with the 3rd Battalion, 3rd Regiment, up on Highway 9 coming out of Khe Sanh to Highway 1 at Dong Ha, I think it was, or Phu Bai. And he listened to us and he was spellbound by all our war stories. [Laughs] Medal of Honor, and we're sitting there going, "Boy, did you just prick our balloon and deflate it." But ever since then−I went to the reunion last year; two years ago, it was in Mobile, Alabama, one year it was in Charleston, South Carolina, last year it was in Washington, DC, this year it's in Las Vegas. Every year we get together as we get older, our war stories become more embellished, and some of us−like the ladies−they go, "My God, you all should be wearing those medals around your neck." Well you know, allow us to… We're in our sixties now, okay, allow us to enjoy our exploits, we're just a band of brothers. We'd do anything for each other, absolutely anything. I love being with these guys. I'd walk on crushed glass for these guys, because we fought in an unpopular war and we all survived. We all carried baggage, we all have our little demons, but we never showed it amongst ourselves, but we know it; we know it.

MR: Well thank you very much for your interview.